

## **ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS**

Drugs are related to violence in multiple and complex ways. Research has demonstrated a relatively strong correlation between violence and psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illegal drugs. However, the underlying relationship differs by type of drug. For instance, alcohol, narcotics, hallucinogens, and stimulants affect users in very different ways and are related to different kinds of violent and aggressive behavior.

In behavioral experiments, alcohol is the only psychoactive substance consistently found to increase aggression. However, the immediate effects of intoxication are not the only, or necessarily, the most significant. Both drug composition and social factors related to use can affect whether violence occurs.

The need for preventing alcohol and other drug abuse, as well as violence, is clear when the following statistics are examined.

### **Substance Use, Crime and Violence**

- Among the estimated 3.7 million adults on probation at some time in the past year, 24.2 percent reported using an illicit drug in the past month in 2000. This compares with a rate of 5.5 percent among adults not on probation.<sup>1</sup>
- Young adult males are more likely than other demographic groups to be involved in alcohol-related homicides and assaults.<sup>2</sup>
- Of all psychoactive substances, alcohol is the one whose use has been most clearly shown to increase aggression.<sup>3</sup>
- Amphetamine, cocaine, LSD and PCP use may also precipitate violence in certain individuals in particular contexts.<sup>3</sup>
- According to the National Victimization Survey (NCVS), in 1999, based on victims perceptions, 1.2 million violent crimes occurred each year in which victims were certain that the offender had been drinking. For about 1 in 4 of these violent victimizations involving alcohol by the offender, victims believed the offender was also using drugs at the time of the offense.<sup>4</sup>
- In 1999, 13.3 percent of all convicted jail inmates said they committed their offense to get money to buy drugs. Of convicted property offenders, 24.4 percent said they committed their crimes to get money to buy drugs.<sup>5</sup>
- The Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR) of the Federal Bureau of

Investigation (FBI) reported that in 1999, 4.5 percent of the 12,658 homicides were known to be narcotics related. Murders that occurred specifically during a narcotics felony, such as drug trafficking or manufacturing, are considered drug related.<sup>6</sup>

- In the 1997 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 33 percent of State prisoners and 22 percent of Federal prisoners said they had committed their current offense while under the influence of drugs.<sup>5</sup>

### **Substance Use and Violence Against Women**

- According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, two-thirds of victims suffering violence by a current or former spouse or partner report that the perpetrator had been drinking, compared to less than one-third of stranger victimizations. Among spouse victims, three out of four incidents reportedly involved an offender who had been drinking.<sup>7</sup>
- According to a 1999 study, women assaulted by intimate partners during the past 12 months reported significantly higher substance abuse as well as other health-related problems. Of those women experiencing physical violence, 33 percent reported drug and alcohol problems, compared to 16 percent of those who did not experience violence.<sup>8</sup>
- Domestic violence also has an effect on other family members. A study in Massachusetts found that children who witnessed abuse of their maternal caregiver were 50 % more likely to abuse drugs and/or alcohol.<sup>9</sup>

### **Substance Use and Child Abuse**

- Though there is no “cause” of abuse and no specific profile of abusers, many factors contribute and make abuse more likely to occur. Pressures on the family, alcohol and drug abuse, and social isolation can all lead to parental stress and increase the chances that a parent will strike out at their child.<sup>10</sup>
- Nearly 4 in 10 child victimizers reported that they had been drinking at the time of the crime. Among drinkers, about half reported that they had been drinking for 6 hours or more preceding the offense.<sup>11</sup>
- A 1999 study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse found that children of substance-abusing parents were almost three times likelier to be abused and more than four times likelier to be neglected than children of parents who are not substance abusers.<sup>12</sup>

### **Substance Use and Child Mental Health**

- SAMHSA’s evaluation of the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services

Program for Children found that children's mental health problems are closely related to parental substance abuse, maltreatment, and other forms of family violence.<sup>13</sup>

### **Substance Use and Pregnancy**

- Prenatally drug-exposed children were found to have small differences in IQ scores and medium sized differences in receptive and expressive language functioning.<sup>14</sup> An analysis by Brown University estimates that the special education needed to keep these children from failing in school could cost up to \$352 million per year.

### **Substance Use and Sexual Risk**

- Youth who are sexually active and female youth who become pregnant are much more likely to be involved in some form of delinquency and more likely to use alcohol or other drugs.<sup>15</sup>
- Girls who have been pregnant report substantially higher rates of alcohol and drug use.<sup>15</sup>
- Recent research for females suggests that early substance abuse is related to teen pregnancy and premature independent living and that for males, it is related to impregnating a girl during adolescence.<sup>16</sup>
- Among students who were sexually active, 24.8 percent had used alcohol or drugs at the time of their last sexual intercourse. Male students (31.2 percent) were significantly more likely than female students (18.5 percent) to have used alcohol or drugs at the time of their last sexual intercourse.<sup>17</sup>

### **Substance Use and Fatal Injury**

- The use of alcohol has also been linked to fatal injuries. A recent study by Gordon Smith and his colleagues<sup>18</sup> found that alcohol is an important factor in many fatal non-traffic injuries and that its importance varies by cause of injury. Alcohol was a major contributing factor in:

32 percent of all homicide cases;  
31 percent for unintentional injury deaths; and  
23 percent for suicide cases.

- An estimated 32 percent of fatal accidents involved an intoxicated driver or pedestrian.<sup>7</sup>
- There is a strong relationship between average blood alcohol content (BAC) among drinking drivers in fatal accidents and prior driving record-consistently,

those with prior suspensions, invalid licenses, and prior driving while intoxicated (DWI) convictions reflected the highest BAC's at the time of the crash. Among drivers in fatal accidents who had at least two prior DWI convictions, the average BAC was .21 g/dl, the highest of any group surveyed.<sup>7</sup>

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